

Close Study: Close Viewing Maggie Foscett

Artist: [Maggie Foscett](#) (1919, São Paulo, Brazil–2014, Sanibel, Florida)



Work: Maggie Foscett, *Shedding Eden*, 1994; Cliché-verre, 20 x 16 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of the artist; © Maggie Foscett

About the Artwork: Maggie Foscett, who called herself “[a rag picker of small cosmologies in nature](#),” traversed unbeaten paths seeking remnants of reptile skin, insect wings, leaves, and other oddments that people typically trample. Arranging these fragile finds on small squares of glass, she magnified them in her enlarger and printed directly onto light-sensitive paper. This process, *cliché-verre*, is a nineteenth-century precursor to photography. Larger than life and suffused with light, Foscett's images reveal little-known details of physical structures and make the familiar seem strange, even menacing.

Target grade range: K–2

DCPS Curricular Unit: Patterns in Nature

DCPS Curricular Arc: Determination/Patterns & Rhythms

DCPS Curricular Theme: Patterns in nature

Note: Annotation is a key feature of Close Study, ensuring that students are engaged in the process of evidence gathering. Annotation can take a range of forms across grade levels and disciplines. Annotation can provide assessment information as to each student's depth of comprehension. Additionally, it can be a useful tool for launching critical discussions. Encourage students to annotate this work physically or virtually.

Round 1

Type of Question: General Understanding/Responses

Sample Question: **How would you describe what you see in this artwork?**

Guidance: The goal of this conversation is to generate a range of student responses to the work. There is no wrong answer, but rather the idea is to open the conversation and create an

Adapted from DCPS's “Close Study: A Critical Process” and “Close Study: Close Viewing” documents.

environment in which students see the value of both their own opinion and the possible range of opinions.

Round 2

Type of Question: Key Details

Sample Question: **What elements (or parts) of this artwork remind you of nature?**

Guidance: The conversation should focus on gathering evidence from the image; formal and technical evidence, as well as evidence based on the imagery. Student responses should include discussion of specific visual aspects of the work. You may ask guiding questions such as, **“What patterns (repetition of elements) in this artwork might you find elsewhere in the natural world?”** pushing students to focus on the visual aspects of the work and how they might begin to support the responses discussed in Round 1.

Round 3

Type of Question: Structure

Sample Question: **Look first at the whole composition. Compare the right and left sides. Would you describe this work as symmetrical (the sides are the same) or asymmetrical (the two sides are different)? What do you see that makes you think that?**

Now choose one element in this work to investigate more closely. Would you describe that element as symmetrical or asymmetrical? What do you see that makes you think that?

Guidance: This discussion should focus more specifically on how the structure of the work is supporting the students' interpretations of the work. This conversation might be around compositional strategies, the use of evocative visual designs, or the inclusion of distinct features.

Round 4

Type of Question: Intent/Inferences

Sample Question: **Maggie Foskett’s work is both inspired by and made of natural elements. Foskett credits her childhood in Brazil with her attention to the natural world: “It was second nature to be wary, to shake out our shoes in the morning and to look closely at what lay underfoot.”**

She would collect the flora (plants of a particular place) and fauna (animals of a particular place) where she lived, create collages with them, and then use an enlarging machine and

light-sensitive paper to create a photograph-like image that shows the original elements larger than life.

In looking closely at the enlarged snake skin and leaf in *Shedding Eden*, what do you notice that may have been overlooked with the naked eye? How are the snake skin and leaf similar? How are they different?

How might the verb “shedding” in this work’s title relate to the growth or change of a [snake](#)? Of a tree? Of other plants and animals?

Guidance: Unlike the intentional omission of information in other rounds, prior to asking students to respond to this question, the teacher should provide some context for the work. This context should come in the form of another visual work. The nature of the context should promote the goals of the overall lesson or unit. This work might be:

- Another work by the same artist
- A work that serves a similar purpose in a more familiar context
- Another work from the same school, movement, or genre

Possible Contextual Works:

- [Reika Iwami](#), *Flower and Water*, 1982; Woodcut on paper, 20 1/2 x 13 3/4 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Kappy Hendricks
 - **About the Artwork:** Iwami uses simple materials—ink, wood, and metal leaf—to create abstract compositions that capture the subtle qualities of nature. Using woodblocks with distinct textures as her matrices, the artist creates exquisitely crafted prints combining sensitively printed areas of black, white, and grey with blind embossing, metal leaf, mica, and handmade paper. According to collectors Mary and Norman Tolman, “Iwami’s subject is water and its flow, and her genius lies in the almost mystical ability to transmute the grain and texture of pieces of wood she has found into visual images of patterns of water.” (Source: <https://scma.smith.edu/blog/tolman-collection-reika-iwami>)
- [Barbara Takenaga](#), *Angel (Little Egypt)*, edition 13/15, 2007; Lithograph with metallic gold powder, state I, 24 1/4 x 20 1/4 in.; Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer; Photo by Strode Photographic LLC; Courtesy of the artist and Shark’s Ink
 - **About the Artwork:** Takenaga’s repetitive motifs evoke the macrocosm of the infinite universe as well as the microcosm of molecular life. As Takenaga describes, “There is a reference to the natural world, as well as the heavenly, but in an abstract, decorative approach.” Her meticulous and repetitive approach to artmaking mirrors the qualities of work historically associated with women, such as embroidering and knitting.

Round 5

Type of Question: Opinion/Application

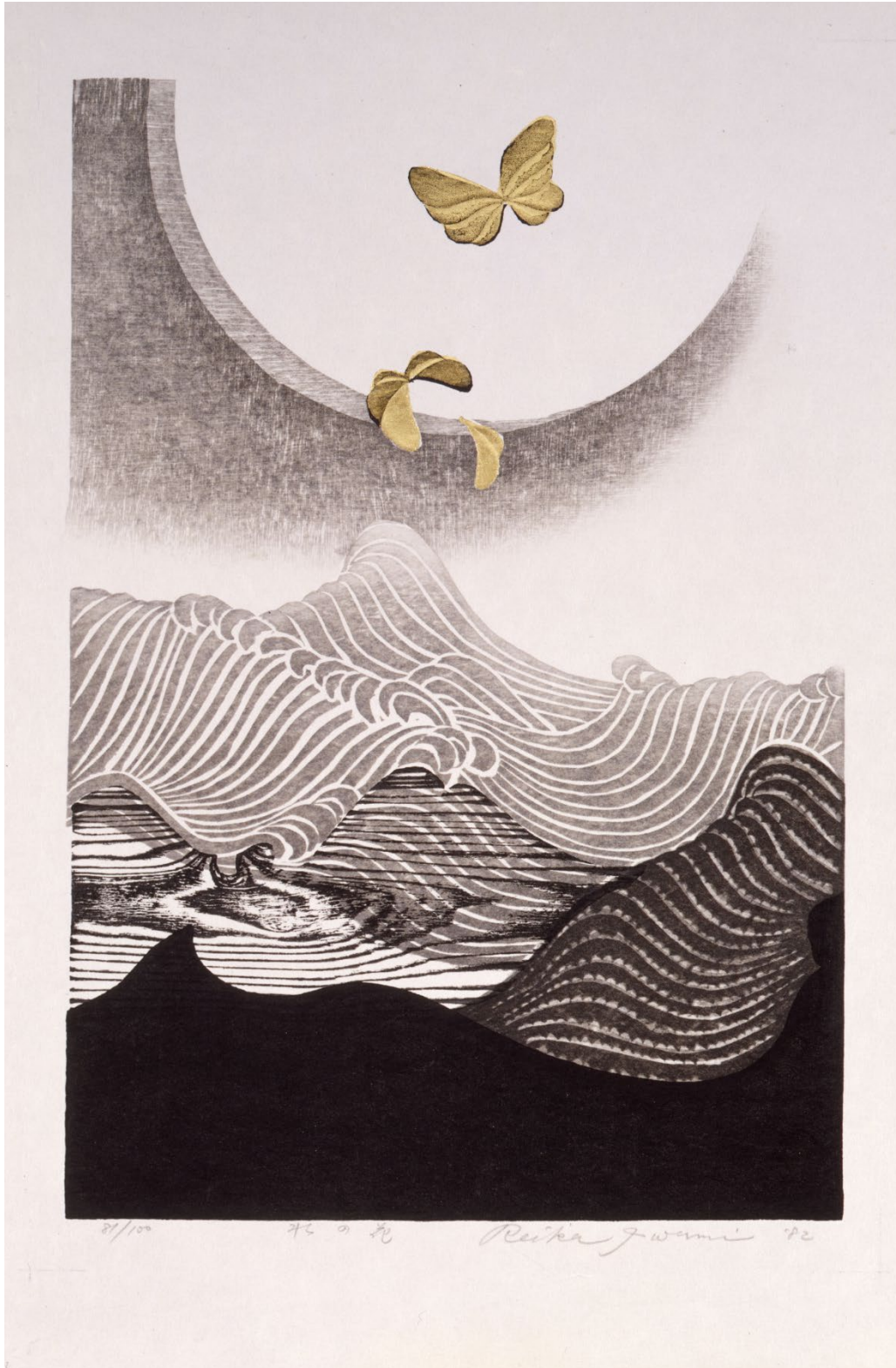
Sample question: **Many artists seek to depict and imitate patterns in nature, and they do so in a variety of interesting ways. Foskett incorporated actual elements of nature in her collages to create her images. Reika Iwami inked and printed wood grain as it resembles flowing water. Barbara Takenaga embellishes her work with metallic powders to suggest the colorful sheen and reflection of light we see on birds' feathers.**

If you were asked to make an artwork that reflected the natural world where you live (this could be your yard, neighborhood, school grounds, or local park), 1) what would you choose to depict, 2) what natural element(s) would you use to make your work, and 3) what shapes and patterns would you include?

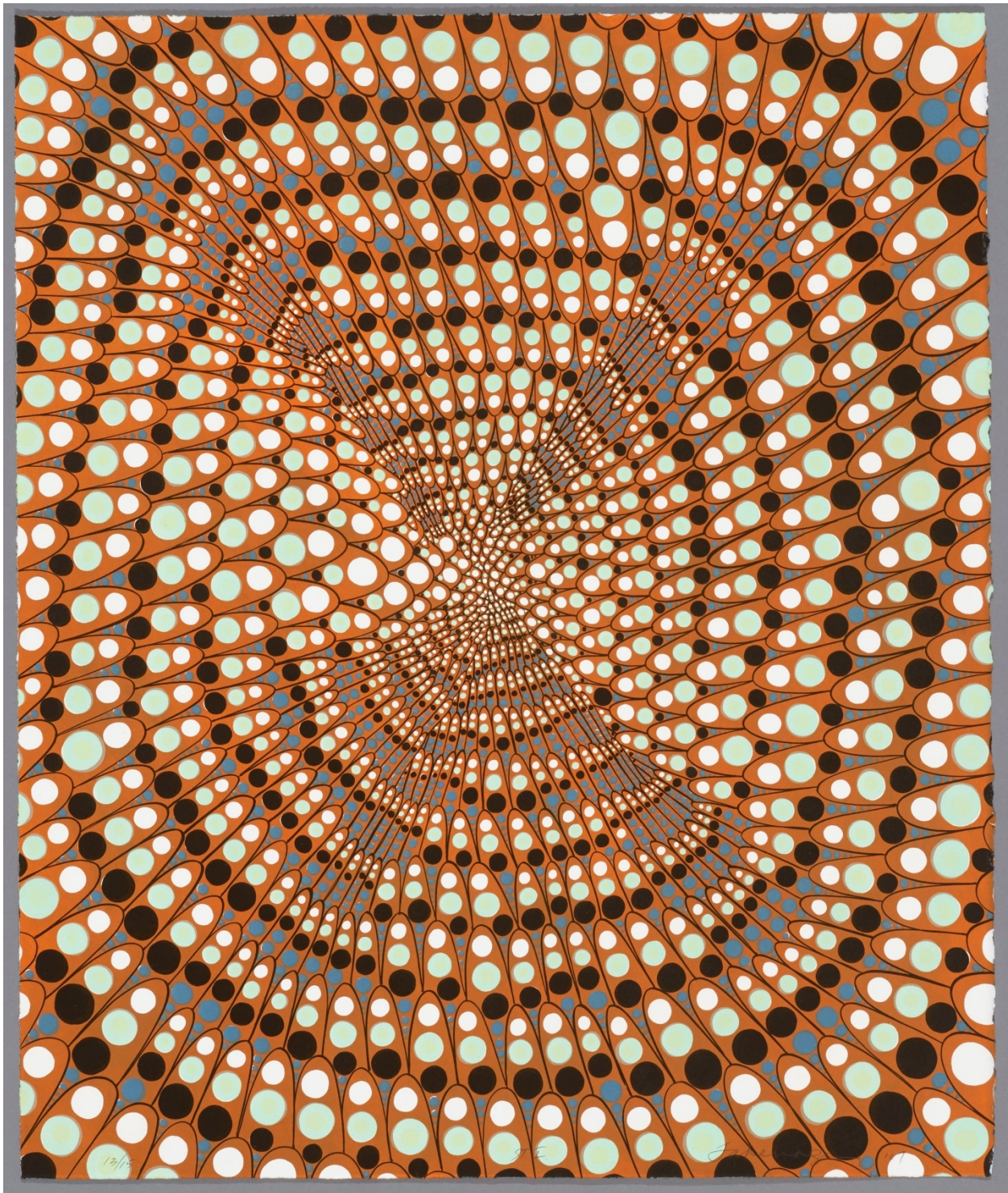
Guidance: This round is asking students to internalize the knowledge and information built in the previous rounds by using the concepts generated to visualize a work that applies to a personal goal of communication. The direction of this question is directly related to the broader thematic goal of the lesson or unit.



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